Religious Studies

(offered by the Department of Religious Studies and Arabic)
Telephone number 012 429 4523

1 Introduction

Religious Studies offers the opportunity for a comparative study of the religions (‘systems of ultimate meaning’) developed by humankind in the course of its history. In the pluralistic South African society which comprises both mainstream and minority religions, and both the oldest and the most recent developments in religious history, the subject has a wide range of applications in a variety of professional fields (including teaching, religious work, peace work, public service, development work, the health and counselling professions, the diplomatic and political fields, and journalism). It does not proceed from and does not propagate any religious assumptions or practices. Religion is approached as part and parcel of the overall cultural, social, economic, political and other processes of human life. The modules provide an integrated package comprising both ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ strands. The ‘vertical’ modules refer to the unique histories and characteristic features of the following religions: African religion, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and new and alternative religious movements. However, other religions are also referred to where applicable. The ‘horizontal’ modules provide comparative studies, cutting across the various individual religions and families of religions, such as concepts of divinity, public life, mysticism, gender, and religious thought.

2 General Information

Credit for a degree is granted for:
(i) either RST121 and RST122 or RST101 and RST102 or SRA100 and SRB100
(ii) either RST221 and RST321 or RST327
(iii) either RST322 and RST325 or RST325
(iv) either RST323 and RST325 or RST325

3 Religious Studies as a Major Subject

Compulsory modules for a major subject combination:

First level: RST121, 122
Second level: RST224
Third level: RST325 and FIVE of the following: RTS222, 223, 225, 324, 327, 328

4 Transitional Arrangements

Students who passed a half-course at first-year level in the old curriculum, retain credit for the half-course they passed and should consult the transitional arrangements of the relevant subject chapter in connection with conversion to the new modularised curriculum.

The old semester modules (RST101, 102, etc) are equivalent to the year modules (RST121, RST122, etc) for these purposes.

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■ Students who have passed RST221X or RST3214 may not register for RST327B.
■ Students who have passed RST3236 or RST326A may not register for RST328C.
■ Students who have passed HRS413S and HRS414T may not register for HRS416V.

5 Syllabus

All modules in this subject are offered as YEAR MODULES. These contain exactly the same amount of study material as the semester modules but allow students a longer period of study.
FIRST-LEVEL MODULES

RST121U  Comparative religious studies: introduction to the religions of the world*
Purpose: to gain insight into the religions of the world, with the possibility of concentrating on at least four of the following: African religion, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, contemporary and alternative religious movements; and to apply these insights in public and professional life.

RST122V  Comparative religious studies: introduction to the theory of religion*
Purpose: to enable students to demonstrate understanding of religion as an important factor in individual and public life, with reference to the following dimensions: religion and society, religion and experience, myth and ritual, religious thought, and interreligious dynamics.

SECOND-LEVEL MODULES

Prerequisite: TWO first-level modules in this subject or any FOUR first-level modules

RST222Y  Africa’s religious heritage*
Advice: Students are advised to register for RST121 and RST122 prior to or together with this module.
Purpose: to enable students to demonstrate insight into African religion, giving attention to Christianity and Islam on the African continent, including the contemporary dynamics of African religion, African Christianity, African Islam and the coexistence of these religions in Africa.

RST2233  Judaism, Christianity and Islam: a comparative study*
Advice: Students are advised to register for RST121 and RST122 prior to or together with this module.
Purpose: to gain insight into the three Abrahamic faiths, with emphasis on both their unique and related elements, and with reference to Scripture and tradition, monotheism, authority, worship and ritual, ethics, the material culture, political order, and dialogue.

RST2244  Ultimacy, divinity and nature of religious history*
Advice: Students are advised to register for RST121 and RST122 prior to or together with this module.
Purpose: to enable students to demonstrate an understanding of the ‘history of God’ with reference to African religion, monotheism (Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Baha’i), Hinduism, Buddhism, pantheism, panentheism and process thought, and cosmic ecology.

RST2255  New religious movements: cults, New Age and related phenomena*
Advice: Students are advised to register for RST121 prior to or together with this module.
Purpose: to enable students to demonstrate their understanding of the emergence and significance of cults and new religious movements (NRMs) in modern society (including definitions, incidence and significance, typology, factors that determine the success or failure of NRMs, and NRMs with respect to violence and the media).

THIRD-LEVEL MODULES

Prerequisite: TWO first-level modules in this subject or any FOUR first-level modules

RST3248  Meditation and mysticism*
Advice: Students are advised to register for RST224 prior to or together with this module.
Purpose: to enable students to demonstrate an understanding of meditation as the experiential dimension of ‘mysticism’/’spirituality’ with reference to some individual mystics, classical writings and schools – both traditionally religious and secular, past and present.

RST3259  Postmodern philosophy of religion*
Advice: Students are advised to register for RST224 prior to or together with this module.
Purpose: to gain insight into the implications of postmodernism with respect to religious thought, including postmodern critiques of past religious-metaphysical systems, the postmodern and deconstructive renewal of the search for transcendence, and the religious dimensions of deconstructive thought.

RST327B  Asian faiths: culture, religion and philosophy*
Advice: Students are advised to register for RST121U prior to, or together with this module.
Purpose: to gain understanding of the classical teachings and philosophies in various historical schools and contemporary societies. Students are given a choice between the study of Hinduism and Buddhism in this module.

HONOUR’S LEVEL

The Honour’s degree comprises five modules, the four below as well as an honour’s module from another discipline (to be approved by the Chair of the Department).

HRS411Q  Interhistory of religions*
Syllabus: Various religions of the world are studied comparatively in large-scale format, i.e. in their mutual historical connections, implications and interpenetrations and their structural similarities. Within this framework it will be possible to concentrate on one or more clusters of religions, such as: African religions; African religion, Christianity and Islam; Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Baha’i; Hinduism and Buddhism; Buddhism and Christianity; Confucianism and Taoism; and esoteric and new religions.
HRS412R   Theories of religion*
Syllabus: A variety of theoretical/philosophical approaches to the plurality of religions of the world and religion as a generic phenomenon, representing the historical range of such reflections from antiquity to contemporary thought in various cultural and religious traditions, is studied critically and constructively.

HRS415U  Research methodologies in religion*
Purpose: This paper consists of three parts, any of which might be taken: qualitative methodology, hermeneutics and methodology in Arabic and Islamic Studies. Students will choose qualitative methodology with a view to empirical research on religion. Hermeneutics will draw on reading strategies existing in various religions and on a variety of contemporary theorists and philosophers of language (reading, writing) with a view to the reading and interpretation of religious documents. Students in Arabic and Islamic Studies will choose the third option on Arab and Islamic cultures, linguistic studies, and historiography.

HRS416V  Religion in private and public life*
Purpose: Students choose between two options: Religions in societies or Religious experience, mysticism and spirituality. In Religions in societies the interface between various religions from a variety of religio-cultural continents and the societies in which they occurred is studied comparatively. Within that framework a number of aspects, such as the issue of gender, education, church-state relationship, religious freedom and religions and world peace are concentrated on. In the second option the historical, phenomenological and theoretical dimensions are combined in a critical and constructive study of religious experience in a variety of religions, including the phenomena of mysticism and spirituality. The range of authors and scriptures includes, for example, the types of nature mysticism and metaphysical mysticism.